

Local Government Act 1972



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held on Monday 6th March 2023 at 7.30pm in the Palmer Room, Langton Green Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors Curry (Chair), Barrington-Johnson, Dooley, Ellery, Lyle, Norton, Rajah, Scarbrough, Soyke and Tarricone.

OFFICERS PRESENT

K Neve, Clerk, K Harman, Assistant Clerk (minutes), C Barrett, Assistant Clerk and C May, Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

IN ATTENDANCE

Borough Cllrs Allen, Sankey and Willis were in attendance. Apologies had been received from County Cllr McInroy.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were approximately 20 members of the public present.

23/48 Covid Compliance

Those in attendance were free to decide whether to wear a mask according to their own wishes.

23/49 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded by the Clerk for accuracy of the minutes. The recording would be deleted once the meeting minutes are signed off at the next Full Council meeting. Daphne Streeter asked to take a photograph.

23/50 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence.

Apologies had been received from Rowe (away) and Turner (Covid-related).

23/51 Disclosure of Interests

Cllr Ellery and K Harman both declared an interest in item 14 – they are both shareholders of the Speldhurst Community Shop Ltd.

23/52 Declarations of Lobbying

Cllrs Curry and Lyle had been lobbied extensively on the Langton Green Pavilion.

23/53 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 6th February 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes, previously forwarded to members were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair agreed that his report and the Borough Councillors' Reports (Items 8 and 9) would be brought forward ahead of the Public Open Session because they may contain information which could be useful for members of the public to hear before they gave representations.

23/55 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

County Cllr McInroy had provided a report to the clerk as follows:

- The Kent County Council (KCC) Budget for 2023/24 had been passed, providing the funds required for all statutory services to be provided, as outlined last month.

Borough Cllr Sankey reported the following:

- **The Budget:** Following a six-week consultation, the Borough Partnerships Budget was passed on 1st March. A multi-million-pound deficit had been inherited by the partnership who had worked hard to create a forward-thinking plan for the borough. Further information was available on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) website.
- **Council Tax:** TWBC members had voted unanimously to approve the council tax for 2023/24 which included Speldhurst Parish Council's (SPC) precept. Full details would be made available soon.
- **TWBC Plan:** The Borough Partnership's short-term plan called 'Building a Better Borough' had been voted through. It sets out the priorities for TWBC for 2022-24. A longer-term Corporate Plan was being worked on which was expected to be adopted before the end of 2024 and considers the way residents live and work following Covid and incorporates: 1. Focus on Five priorities; 2. The context in which TWBC operates; 3. Operating Principles and Key projects and 4. Future work programme.
- **The Community Support Fund:** Launched in 2022 the £100,000 fund supports those organisations most in need in the borough. Six applicants had recently been awarded grants: Charlie's Angels Kitchen; The Volunteer Bureau; Nourish; Number One Community Trust; Parish Larders and West Kent Mind.
- **The Asset Register:** To encourage transparency, this list of TWBC's assets had become public knowledge which had led to misunderstandings and political propaganda. Assets were annually assessed for their viability and to date no decisions regarding community centres and carparks had been agreed by TWBC Full Council.
- **Royal Tunbridge Wells (RTW) Business Improvement District (BID):** The BID was seeking a new leader. The BID is funded by businesses with a levy and supports initiatives such as Christmas lights and Local & Live.
- **Town Hall Shared Space Project:** The Town Hall's office space had been divided up with one third having been updated for TWBC's officers to work in shared spaces. The remaining two thirds were being rented by Town Centre Spaces for commercial co-working.
- **The UK Shared Prosperity Fund:** A reminder for parish councils to apply.
- **The Langton Green Pavilion Café:** Without any political agenda, Cllr Sankey said that he was saddened to read of the finger pointing and random messaging surrounding this matter. His offer to act as mediator between the three parties involved to try and come to a mutually agreeable way forward had been accepted however he would not be taking part in any decision making. He also offered himself up as a mentor using his experience in the local hospitality industry to help either Emma or another licensee at the Pavilion. Cllr Sankey thanked Justin Gardner for his recent help regarding the pavilion license.

23/56 Chair's Report

Cllr Curry thanked everyone for attending the meeting to speak or hear about the pavilion café. He reminded the meeting that councillors were all unpaid volunteers and were doing their best to support the community in a difficult situation.

23/54 Public Open Session

There were approximately 20 members of the public present including Lucy Doyle, Justin Gardner, Daphne Streeter, Garry Saunders, James Bowdidge, Nicci Levy, Jane and Tim Troy, Simon McNair, Rebecca Leach, Matt and Emma Howden, Cllr Nancy Warne, Caroline May and Tom Franks.

Q: Justin Gardner: Assuming SPC will not renew the existing licence for the pavilion for financial reasons, how long would it take for a figure for a contingency or shortfall to be produced which could be worked towards in an effort to extend the existing licence? During that period, can an offer be made on the current licence terms with a view to some sort of amended licence in the interim followed by an offer to the existing licensee?

A: Cllr Lyle advised that the assumption that the inability to extend the licence arose from financial reasons was incorrect. While a deficit was projected for the coming financial year, measures were being investigated to reduce costs, and the issue of an extension of the license went beyond the bounds of the income derived from the café. Cllr Rajah said that SPC would be happy to continue with the existing license and that financial matters were not the deal-breaker as far as SPC were concerned. He reminded the meeting that there were three parties in the negotiations.

Q: Lucy Doyle: With the potential closure of the pavilion café and also the children's centre in Rusthall, what would SPC be doing to provide facilities for pre-school age children in the local area?

A: Cllr Lyle said that it was beyond the remit, expertise and authority of the parish council to provide such services.

Q: James Bowdidge, Chair of the Langton Green Village Society (LGVS): The LGVS was concerned about the loss of such a valued community asset and was happy to support Cllr Sankey in his efforts to resolve the issue. He reminded the meeting that five residents would be losing their jobs and the existing licensee would be losing the business she had built up over the past seven years of hard work.

A: Cllr Curry said that SPC were aware of the strong feelings within the parish in support of the pavilion café and thanked the local community for sharing their thoughts and asked them to continue to do so by emailing the Clerk. All comments received were being collated.

Q: James Bowdidge: I have heard on the grapevine that LGCSA are hoping to install an all-weather pitch, is there any truth in this?

A: Cllr Curry said that he was not aware of a link between the two matters. Cllr Rajah reminded the meeting that SPC was merely a consultee and would continue to submit responses to any applications in the parish in the normal way. The parish council does not make decisions regarding any planning applications, that is done by TWBC. We believe LGCSA is considering this for the field next to the LGRG, this land is not owned by SPC.

Emma Howden, current pavilion café licensee then spoke. She thanked everyone for their support which she had found overwhelming and amazing and hoped the talks would lead to something positive.

Rebecca Leach said that the outpour from the local community was testament to a village totally invested in its residents and it was heart-warming to see something so positive.

The Chair agreed to bring Item 16 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) forward.

23/63 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) Report by Cllr Lyle:

- a) **Update on the investigation into the energy efficiency of the boiler:** The third plumber's report had not been received despite chasing and of the two received, Kestrel Mechanical Services Ltd was the preferred contractor. Given the uncertainty surrounding the pavilion at the current time, Cllr Lyle recommended that a reduced quote to separate the 800l hot water cylinder, leaving the boiler using its own internal 200 l storage only, with a timer system and valves installed to minimise running costs at a cost of approximately £1,500 would be sensible and this course of action was agreed by councillors. A maximum spend of £8,000 had previously been resolved by Full Council.

- b) **Update on the Pavilion Review:** Cllr Curry thanked members of the public for attending the meeting and said that Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) welcomed the mediation in the hope that it will lead to something positive.
To consider the rental of the café for March: Cllr Curry advised, for information, that the final rental payment for March may not be received. The existing license would expire on 31st March. Cllr Sankey was hoping to work with all three parties involved to try and achieve a resolution in the coming weeks. Justin Gardner asked if the existing license could be extended to the end of May on a temporary basis. Cllr Curry said that whilst SPC were happy for the license to continue, they were unable to agree to this on behalf of the other parties.
- c) **Rates Review:** After much discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to send the drafted letter to TWBC to ascertain SPC's rateable position.
- d) **SPC Pavilion Ltd:** Cllr Curry advised that regrettably, Cllr Barrington-Johnson would be stepping down from SPC in May and bearing in mind that both he and Cllr Soyke, who was also stepping down, were Directors of SPC Pavilion Ltd, he recommended to councillors that the company be wound down and other ways to achieve rates relief sought. This course of action was agreed in principle and would be voted on at a future meeting.

23/57 Clerk's Report

The Clerk reported for councillors' information, the following:

- The new Energy Bills Discount Scheme which runs from 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024, would automatically be applied.
- KCC's Community Services Consultation which would be promoted to residents on social media.

23/58 General Matters

New – Items arising since last Full Council Meeting

	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
17/23	Instruct Kestrel Mechanical Services Lt to carry out the work on the Pavilion boiler.	Cllr Lyle	06/03/23	
18/23	Send Rates letter to TWBC.	Clerk	06/03/23	
19/23	Promote KCC Community Services Consultation on social media.	Asst Clerk (CB)	06/03/23	
20/23	Put Planning TofR on website.	Clerk	06/03/23	
21/23	Submit nomination papers for May elections by 4/4/23.	All Cllrs	06/03/23	
22/23	Sign up for Great British Spring Clean, Cllrs to take part and promote on social media.	Clerk/Asst Clerk Cllrs	06/03/23	
23/23	Confirm acceptance of Landscape Services Contract.	Clerk	06/03/23	
24/23	Put AWG policies on website.	Clerk	06/03/23	
25/23	Share Gatwick Briefing Session slides with Cllrs.	Cllr Barrington-Johnson/Clerk	06/03/23	

Ongoing

89/22	Confirm appointment of Pavilion Building Manager.	Pav Man Cttee	04/11/22	On hold
97/22	Purchase and installation of horse warning signs.	Highways WG	04/11/22	In progress
3/23	Replace heating system at Pavilion.	Cllrs Curry/Lyle	09/01/23	In progress
9/23	Trial weed control April-Sept without use of glyphosate.	Env WG	09/01/23	In progress

	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
10/23	Start informal discussions with potential candidates interested in standing as Parish Cllrs at May elections.	Cllrs Barrington-Johnson, Dooley, Ellery, Rajah & Tarricone/Clerk	060223	In progress
13/23	Write first version of Spring Newsletter.	Assist Clerk (CB) to liaise with Cllrs Norton/Tarricone	060223	In progress

23/59 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Ellery

- There had not been a meeting of the Finance Committee since the last Full Council meeting.
- Report on budget virements: There were none.
- Interim payments made since the last meeting:

Unity Account: £15.83 Kidman's Ltd for LGRG maintenance.

Mastercard: £3.00* Land Registry Enquiry, £19.99* & £10.57* Amazon for computer equipment, £7.34*, £2.76* & £14.58* Amazon for stationery, £19.95* Amazon for descaler for Pavilion showers and £59.77* LG Service Station for petrol, £3.00* Land Registry Enquiry.

- Decisions made under delegated authority are starred * above.

23/60 Accounts for Payment

It was **RESOLVED** that the invoices as listed below and checked by Cllr Rajah, be paid.

Payee Name	Reference	Amount £	Detail
BT	DD	25.92	Mobile Phone
Cloudy IT	MT2421	272.82	IT Support
KALC	MT2422	48.00	Training
PPL PRS Ltd	MT2423	360.62	Music Licence
KCC (KCS)	DD	56.06	Photocopier (old)
KCC (KCS)	DD	131.83	Photocopier (new)
JLM Pest Control	MT2426	230.00	Pest Control
Dyno-Rod	MT2427	540.00	Drain Repair
Viking Direct	MT2428	131.84	Stationery and Pavilion Expenses
KALC	MT2429	60.00	Training
Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2430	27.75	Meeting Room
Langton Green Charitable Trust	MT2432	700.69	SPC Electricity (Office)
HMRC	MT2433	1,158.59	HMRC
M:power accounting	MT2431	48.00	M:power accounting
Langton Life	MT2435	375.00	Langton Life Article
Groombridge Magazine	MT2436	18.50	Magazine
Tate & Tonbridge Fencing	MT2437	1,703.54	Groombridge Fencing
N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	439.31	N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme
BT PLC	DD	176.65	Phone and Broadband
Employees	MT2434	4,711.19	Salaries
EDF Energy	DD	1,721.00	Pavilion Energy
Castle Water	DD	224.33	Pavilion Water
TOTAL PAYMENTS		£13,161.64	

23/61 Speldhurst Chapel Project

Cllr Curry provided an update saying that there was a village meeting planned for 8th March in Speldhurst Village Hall. On the recommendation of SPC's RFO, the working group had been advised that whilst the parish council would not consider taking out a Public Works Board Loan (PWBL) to enable them to gift shares to the village, they might be prepared to consider taking out a PWBL to purchase and own the whole of the chapel site so that some security against the loan could be ascertained for the parish council. The lease would stipulate that SPC would not be involved in the day-to-day running of the facility which would be wholly down to the community. A show of hands indicated that councillors would agree, in principle, to support a PWBL application providing it was secured and a parish-wide consultation evidenced support from residents of all villages in the parish. Cllr Curry made it clear that this vote was not binding and would not start the process of consultation.

23/62 Planning Committee

Report by Cllr Rajah: A meeting had been held on 13th February. Ten applications had been considered on which the committee had remained neutral with the exception of an application for farm workers' accommodation at Burrswood which had been supported.

- It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the Planning Terms of Reference on the recommendation of the Planning Committee.

23/64 Annual Parish Meeting 2023

Cllr Curry advised that meeting preparations were underway with help from Cllrs Norton and Scarbrough. The plan was to keep the agenda fairly simple whilst still being an informative event.

23/65 Langton Green Village Hall

Permission had been given by the Clerk to the Village Hall Trustees for the planned works to update the toilets in the Village Hall on the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair. It was **RESOLVED** to formalise this permission which had been given prior to the meeting because an early formal response had been required by the Trustees.

23/66 Elections May 2023

The Clerk reminded councillors that they would need to submit their nomination for the forthcoming May elections by 4th April. A briefing presentation had been provided by TWBC for them to watch and she asked them to let her know if they had any questions.

23/67 Great British Spring Clean 2023

It was agreed that SPC would support the initiative by sharing its litter picking equipment with anyone in the parish who wanted to organise a group session and advertise it on social media. Councillors also pledged to take part.

23/68 Working Group (WG) and other Reports: to include any meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the draft minutes having previously been forwarded to all Members

- a) **Governance WG** – A meeting had been held on 27th February. Cllr Lyle reported the following:
- The Internal Auditor had carried out his checks and provided the parish council with a clean bill of health.
 - Policies can in future be reviewed up to every three years, at the discretion of the appropriate committee.
 - A new External Auditor had been selected who would carry out an annual audit.
 - The RFO (C May) would be reducing his hours from 1st April 2023 to ten per week leading on to a proposed final retirement date of May 2024.
 - The Clerk (K Neve) would be increasing her hours from 1st April 2023 to allow her time to carry out some finance work. The Assistant Clerk would also be trained up in the use of the finance/accounting software to provide flexibility and back up.

- It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Ellery's access to the banking software would be either transferred to the Assistant Clerk (Kate Harman) if possible or an additional account created for Mrs Harman at a cost of £19 per month so that she could learn and then regularly complete various financial tasks.
- Future security such as encryption and two-factor authentication had been discussed.

b) **Highways WG** – There had not been a meeting and one was planned for the following evening.

c) **Amenities WG (AWG)** – A meeting had been held on 20th February.

- It was **RESOLVED** that the AWG convert back to committee status with effect from the next meeting on the 22nd May 2023 on their recommendation.
- A Speldhurst resident had attended the last meeting requesting a further bin be installed near the village shop. The Assistant Clerk (KH) had received advice from TWBC saying that this was not possible due to various highways and health and safety issues.
- It was **RESOLVED** to accept Landscape Services Annual Contract Quotation with a reduction in the mows of the upper area of the green at Groombridge to 15 per growing season.
- It was **RESOLVED** to instruct The Living Forest to carry out maintenance works to trees on The Green, Langton Green to a maximum cost of £300.50 on the recommendation of the AWG.
- It was **RESOLVED** to carry out the maintenance works to an oak tree on The Boundary, Langton Green at a total cost of £169.50, on the recommendation of the AWG.
- It was **RESOLVED** to readopt the following policies on the recommendation of the AWG:
 - Donations of or Bequests for Park Benches
 - Use of Council Land
 - Guidance for Requesting Permission to Erect Temporary Signs on Council Land
- It was **RESOLVED** to adopt an updated Winter Weather Policy whilst further clarification of SPC's responsibilities and duty of care are obtained from SPC's insurers, on the recommendation of the AWG.
- A quotation had been received from Living Forest to clear the pond on the Boundary which had appeared expensive. Members had discussed approaching local community groups to help first before seeking further quotes.

d) **Air Traffic WG** – There had not been a meeting since the last Full Council. Cllr Barrington-Johnson had attended a Gatwick briefing session and would share the meeting notes.

e) **Environment WG (EWG)** – Cllr Mrs Lyle reported on behalf of the EWG:

- Funding approval had been received from UKSPF towards removal of the laurel in Pocket Park, Speldhurst, which was being carried out in an effort to improve plant health and biodiversity in the area. The funding would be split over two years.
- An update was anticipated regarding electrical charging points in the Village Hall carpark – further information would be shared once available.

f) **KALC** – There was nothing to report.

23/69 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

7th March – Highways Working Group

20th March – Finance Committee

3rd April – Full Council

17th April – Planning Committee

24th April – Governance Committee

25th April – Environment Working Group

23/70 Items for Information:

There were none.

There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

Chair